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Yes We Can! A Phenomenological Study of a Sports Camp for Young People With Cerebral Palsy

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This article contributes to the understanding of embodied practices and experiences within adapted physical activity. It presents a study of a 4-day winter sports camp for young people with cerebral palsy. The experiences of the participants were investigated through qualitative interviews. The findings are analyzed through a phenomenological framework of embodiment and the notions of body schema and body image. By paying special attention to the bodily experience of “I can,” this study shows that participants learned new ways of approaching challenges, gained bodily control in challenging situations, expanded their fields of possible actions through practicing, as well as learned to understand and accept themselves. These findings reveal central values of bodily interventions for people with cerebral palsy and have the potential to inform pedagogical work within the area of adapted physical activity.

Keywords: bodily control, body image, body schema, embodiment, phenomenology

To understand the value of a winter sports camp, it is important to consider the experiences of the participants. Phenomenology provides a solid theoretical and methodological framework for investigating experience. It can contribute with an approach to studies and interventions within adapted physical activity (APA) that is different from other dominating approaches. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the aim and purpose of APA have been interpreted and defined in many— sometimes conflicting—ways (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007). It is generally seen as a cross-disciplinary field of study and practice, where interventions have historically been governed by what in disability research is referred to as the *medical model*, and to a lesser extent a *social model*, of disability (Reid, 2003; Silva & Howe, 2012). In a rough generalization, the medical model implies a focus on the physical and anatomical body. It is rooted in the natural sciences, and disability is in this perspective related to a person's *impairment*. The social model in contrast focuses on structures that stand in the way of participating in social communities. Disability is a form of social oppression and is related to *participation restriction* (see Kristiansen, Vehmas, & Shakespeare, 2009; Oliver, 1996;

Ralston & Ho, 2010). Although a number of scholars agree that APA should move away from the medical model of disability, the medical approach is still reflected in much of the APA literature (Jespersen & McNamee, 2008; Silva & Howe, 2012).

As an alternative to the medical and social models, authors have argued for the relevance of taking a phenomenological approach to disability (Carel, 2013; Peckitt, Inhara, & Cole, 2013; Svenaeus, 2009), and Martiny (2015) has on this basis proposed a phenomenological model of disability. This model focuses on first-person experiences of living with disabilities and asks what the experience of it is like. There has been a growing interest in phenomenological approaches to APA, with several qualitative studies informed by the participant experiences (Bredahl, 2013; Duesund, 2008; Duesund & Skårderud, 2003; Goodwin, Lieberman, Johnston, & Leo, 2011; Standal, 2011, 2014; Standal & Jespersen, 2008). Standal (2014) provides a comprehensive review of phenomenological studies in APA and argues for the relevance of phenomenology as philosophy and pedagogy in the field. He outlines three central concepts from phenomenological philosophy: (a) first-person perspective; (b) embodiment; and (c) life world, suggesting that these concepts can fruitfully contribute to the development of phenomenological pedagogy in APA.

The present study seeks to contribute to these recent developments in the field. We present a study of a winter sports camp for young people with cerebral palsy (CP). CP is defined as a group of disorders affecting the development of postural and motor control and occurring as a result of a nonprogressive lesion in the developing central nervous system, causing activity limitation and muscular hyperactivity (Bax et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 2007). A current trend in research and clinical practices for CP relates to the development and optimization of antispasticity treatment protocols (Pandyan et al., 2005), accompanied by interventions that focus on the neurological, physiological, or biomechanical aspects of motor control and function, which can be said to be governed by the medical model of disability. In this article, we present an alternative to this, as we analyze and discuss the experience of the participants through phenomenological insights regarding bodily experience.

Conceptual Framework

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy concerned with attaining an understanding and description of experience. Part of this is related to the experiential structure of our embodied life or embodiment. A central figure in the development of phenomenological accounts of embodiment is the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his work *The Structure of Behavior*, he argued that behavior (*comportement* in French) cannot be sufficiently understood in physically reductive or intellectualist terms: “behavior is not a thing, but neither is it an idea” (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 127). As an alternative, Merleau-Ponty (1963, p. 182) described movement as a “significative whole” that rests on the experienced meaning of it. In his subsequent work *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) qualified this understanding of bodily subjectivity and movement. Following the works of Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty adopted the term “I can” to describe our bodily being-in-the-world that is prior to “I think.” Between rational thinking and the physical body, he paid special attention to bodily habits, which he clarified to be “a knowledge in our hands, which is only given through a bodily effort and cannot be translated by an objective designation” (Merleau-

Ponty, 1962, p. 166). This implies that bodily understanding and learning are not solely physical or cognitive abilities. They belong to the realm of “I can” and involve experiencing “the accord between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the realization—and the body is our anchorage in a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 167).

On the basis of these phenomenological insights, Gallagher (2005) has pursued an understanding of the experiential aspect of embodiment by clarifying a classic and central distinction between two terms of embodiment: body image and body schema. The body image consists of “a complex set of intentional states and dispositions—perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes—in which the intentional object is one’s own body. This involves a form of reflexive or self-referential intentionality” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 25). The body schema, on the other hand, is “a system of sensory-motor functions that operate below the level of self-referential intentionality. It involves a set of tacit performances—preconscious, subpersonal processes that play a dynamic role in governing posture and movement” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 26). This distinction thus describes the difference between reflective self-awareness (body image) and prereflective self-awareness (body schema). In practice, these experiential dimensions of embodiment are two closely related systems that function intertwined, but the analytical distinction between them can help us better describe and understand embodied experiences.

Embodiment and CP

Importantly, body image and body schema describe two central aspects of human embodiment that we all have in common. Even if bodily experiences can be different for people with CP, the difference is a matter of degree rather than a disruption of the experience of being abled (see Martiny, 2015 for further elaboration). In fact, we will argue that working with people with different kinds of embodiment can shed light on general aspects of bodily subjectivity. Putting this in relation to the terms of embodiment, two aspects can be highlighted.

First, Gallagher (2005, p. 27) describes how: “In much of our everyday experience . . . our attention is directed away from the body; toward the environment or toward some project we are undertaking.” Relying on the body schema is not always possible for people with CP. For example, spasms can force individuals with CP to pay attention to their body to control their movements. In such situations, ordinary movements such as walking involve a different degree of body image because the body is not just tacitly “there.”

Second, Gallagher (2005, p. 29) suggests that “In some pathological cases . . . the subject’s relationship to his/her body is mediated by an observational judgment, and in some cases it is precisely a negative judgment about ownership.” CP can be such a case where the body, due to muscle contractions, seems to do things on its own. This phenomenon can be experienced as “involuntary movements.” A study looking at the body image of adolescents with CP suggests that they are more apt to regard their bodies as unreliable (Hammar, Ozolins, Idvall, & Rudebeck, 2009). As Peckitt et al. (2013, p. 139) have put it, for a person with CP, the experience of the world can be one of “constant and yet unpredictable disruption between intention and action.”

These aspects can illustrate how the general structures of embodiment can be experienced in different ways in the case of CP. The purpose of our study was to explore these experiences in practice. By doing this, we aim to qualify our understanding of the ways in which APA interventions can be of value for people with CP.

Methods¹

Context

The context for our study was a winter sports camp arranged by the Elsass Institute (EI) located near Copenhagen. The camp took place on March 5–9, 2014, and involved the participants traveling to Beitostølen Health Sport Center in Norway. The camp was arranged and carried out by a professional team of two ski instructors and four staff members from EI, one of whom has CP. We will refer to these individuals as pedagogues.

The participants (four girls and seven boys) aged 14–18 were all Danish citizens. They were recruited through the EI mailing list, and all had previously been part of other projects taking place at EI. Together with their parents, they were informed about the study at an introduction day at EI. At this point, participants and parents were able to raise any concerns that they had about the project. Participants and parents were assured that the information and descriptions gathered within the project would be used for research purposes only. They were also informed that there was no required level of development or success criteria for participation. At the end of the introduction day, they each signed a consent form.²

The participants were all diagnosed with a mild degree spastic CP which, in relation to the gross motor function classification system developed for children with CP, correlates to Level I–II (Palisano et al., 1997). This means that the participants have the functional abilities to perform gross motor skills, such as walking, running, and jumping, in most settings, but that the coordination, speed, and balance of their performance may be limited. They may also experience difficulties when tasks become too challenging, such as in walking long distances or in balancing on rough terrain, or crowded, confined spaces.

The main activity at the camp was alpine skiing. In addition, participants took part in other activities such as snow rafting, dog sledding, and indoor social activities. These activities were structured as group activities. A central pedagogical aim of the camp was to create a safe environment where the participants could experience physical, cognitive, and social challenges. Another pedagogical aim was to provide participants with experiences of success and mastery to expand their horizon regarding their capabilities. To achieve these aims, the pedagogues discussed coping strategies with the participants at larger meetings with

1. Some of the descriptions in this section also appear in Martiny and Aggerholm (2016), which has a more elaborated description of the intervention.

2. This kind of study does not require approval from an ethics board in Denmark. According to the Danish Research Ethics Committee, only medical and health care research that involves human biological material, such as tissue, cells, and embryos, needs to be approved by a research committee. Questionnaires, interviews, and registration research only need to be approved if human biological material is part of the project. Nonetheless, the utmost care was taken to ensure that all participants remained safe physically, emotionally, and socially.

everyone present,³ and during the camp, the pedagogues continuously structured and adapted the challenges together with the participants and according to their individual preconditions, expectations, goals, and level of function.

Data Collection

To investigate the experiential value of the winter camp, we conducted qualitative semistructured group interviews. The interview guidelines were inspired by “explicitation interviews” in an attempt to integrate a qualitative interviewing approach with phenomenological philosophy (Bitbol & Petitmengin, 2013; Depraz, Varela, & Vermersch, 2003; Petitmengin, 2006; Petitmengin & Bitbol, 2009; Vermersch, 2009). This form of phenomenological interview aims to take serious the ontological and epistemological commitments that follow from such philosophy. According to Høffding and Martiny (2015), this means following four general commitments:

- (a) To the thing itself: Using the interview to acquire detailed first-person descriptions of an experience in question.
- (b) Invariant structures: Using the interview to grasp the invariant structures of experience.
- (c) Subjectivity cannot be reduced to objectivity: In the interview, the first-person perspective needs to be understood on its own terms.
- (d) Enaction, embodiment, and embeddedness: Phenomenology construes subjectivity as embodied, enactive, and embedded. The interview directly confronts us with these aspects of experience (pp. 22–23).

Adopting an explicitation approach requires a focus on the invariant phenomenological structures of experiences in a way that retains the subjectivity of the experience, including its embodied, enactive, and embedded nature. In addition to these commitments, more specific strategies were used in the interviews, such as seeking detailed descriptions, helping interviewees to focus attention on their experiences, and supporting interviewees as they rendered their experiences into words. Petitmengin (2006) has done excellent work in systematically presenting these strategies. In this article, we cannot do justice to all the details of the phenomenological interview, but one defining feature is that instead of only asking “what” or “why” questions, which tend to draw interviewees toward explanations of their experiences, this interview method uses primarily open “how” questions. In our case, the focus was on how the participants experienced themselves and their bodies before, during, and after the challenging activities on the winter camp. We asked, for example, “How did you cope with that situation?” “How was it to get the skis on?” or we simply responded with a “how?” to their descriptions, to draw the interviewees toward more detailed and descriptive aspects of their experience, enabling them to give first-person descriptions of their lived

3. For example, the pedagogues introduced a color narrative, which the participants could use to describe their experiences of being challenged. Being in the “green zone” indicated that they were not challenged. Being in the “yellow zone” indicated that they were challenged but felt that it was possible to overcome it. Being in the “red zone” indicated that the challenge was experienced as too extreme or overwhelming (see Martiny & Aggerholm, 2016, for more on the pedagogical work related to the camp).

experiences.⁴

Between February 16, 2014, and May 11, 2014, we conducted nine interviews in total. The 11 participants were divided into three groups (one group with three and two groups with four participants), and we performed three interviews with each group: (a) a week before the winter camp, (b) a week after the winter camp, and (c) 2 months after the winter camp. Each interview lasted approximately 1–1½ hr and was recorded with an audio recorder. Prior to the last interviews, we showed the participants a video of themselves skiing as a form of stimulated recall. The choice of group interviews was an intentional attempt to combine structured questioning with more informal conversations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005, pp. 287–288). This strategy allowed for more rich descriptions and the possibility for the participants to add to each other's descriptions. The names of all the participants have been anonymized in this article.

Descriptive Analysis

The nine interviews were transcribed, structured, and analyzed in accordance with phenomenological methods of descriptive analysis (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008, pp. 19–28). We relied on traditional analytical work in phenomenology and used descriptions from the interviews as a point of departure for our phenomenological analysis. In particular, we used the strategy of “phenomenological consistency” to validate the descriptions (see Høffding & Martiny, 2015).

First, we operated with an “internal phenomenological consistency,” which refers to the ability to make comprehensible the descriptions found in the interviews. The more the descriptions can be made comprehensible under a certain phenomenological interpretation, the stronger the internal phenomenological consistency. Second, we operated with an “external phenomenological consistency,” which refers to the ability of the overall account produced to work with and/or against already established theories of the phenomena in question. In our case, this meant theories coming from research in CP, phenomenology, cognitive science, sport science, and APA. External phenomenological consistency encompasses what Petitmengin and Bitbol (2009, p. 391) call “performative consistency,” which they describe as agreement among: (a) the theories, (b) the construction of devices and the understanding of their functioning, (c) the theoretical guidance of measurements, and (d) the results. This understanding of consistency is also seen in the tradition of phenomenology, where validation is understood as socially performative and pragmatic, highlighting the importance of “intersubjective validation” (Varela & Shear, 1999, p. 10) or “intersubjective corroboration” (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008, pp. 29–31). The process of producing and validating knowledge thus requires a collective process to strengthen phenomenological consistency. In our case, the collective process of validation consisted of presenting and discussing descriptions from the interviews with the participants and their parents; with physio- and occupational therapists, psychologists, and neurologists from the EI; and with scholars coming from research in CP, phenomenology, cognitive science, sport science, and APA at conferences and workshops.

4. For a more elaborated account of this interview method and how it relates to the research area of embodied cognition, see Høffding and Martiny (2015).

Findings and Discussion

In the following, we will present and discuss the findings of our analysis. In keeping with the work of Merleau-Ponty and to investigate the value of focusing on embodiment in APA, we focus on three central dimensions of the participants' experiences of "I can": (a) yes I can, (b) yes I can if I practice, and (c) yes we can.

(a) Yes I Can

Findings: Gaining Bodily Control in Challenging Situations. Many of the participants described how they were used to avoiding rather than taking up challenges in their everyday life. For some, the very activity of going away on a camp with people who they did not know in advance was a challenge. Also, because there is rarely snow in Denmark, skiing was an extraordinary activity for the participants. The camp therefore marked a contrast to everyday life, and in the interview prior to the camp, many of the participants expressed not only excitement but also uncertainty and anxiety related to skiing. This apprehension was, for example, expressed by Signe, who said:

My balance, it is maybe not really good, right, and then I think, that when you stand on a pair of skis, where it is slippery, it may become worse than it is already, right . . . or it will be more difficult to keep balance, right . . . But apart from that I look forward to it.⁵

This kind of "mixed emotions" that included worries, insecurity, excitement, and expectations was characteristic both for participants who had been skiing previously and those who had not. A common denominator was uncertainty as they faced the possible experience of "I cannot," which naturally raised the question: "can I do it?"

A significant part of the experience of uncertainty was related to a sense of control. Participants in our study suggested that they often experience stress and try to control situations by reflecting on, thinking about, and planning their actions. This way of gaining control was also part of their experience at the winter camp. As they arrived at Beitostølen and began their endeavors on ski, two of the participants described how they tried to control their movements by talking to their legs as they were skiing to make them do what they wanted them to do. Signe described:

Many times I also spoke to my legs, because my legs don't really want to do what I want. So, there were times where I told them "now you will stop, now it's me who decides" and then we went down the slope again . . . My legs said that they couldn't anymore, they did not want to be there anymore, but my head said something else. I think it's a way to gain control. Often I said "right, right, right, right" or "plough, plough, plough, plough, plough." Many times, I said that to myself, and I think that when you say it out loud, it helps your body to obey . . . It wasn't always that they [her legs] would obey.

Signe's description here is characteristic of several participants. They wanted to do a particular movement but were not always able to do it. In relation to this, Signe mentioned a technique called ploughing, which is a strategy for slowing down on the slope by placing the skis in a V-shape with the ski tips closer together. This makes it easier to keep balance and control speed. Learning to plough gave Søren an experience of control of the current

5. We have translated this and the following quotes from participants.

situation, so he could take on new challenges:

It was great to learn to plough, since then you could accelerate, but before that, you could only take the small hills where you didn't get much speed. When you could plough, then you could take the big ones It was liberating. [I: Were you sometimes uncertain?] Sometimes I was, but not very often. Then I just sat down and gained control. It was great when you got down to the bottom of the hill and then looked up: "I've just run down of that."

Søren's description is one example of how the participants acquired control in the uncertain situation on the slope. From our study, however, it appears that the participants also experienced another kind of control on the ski slope during the camp. One participant, Ditte, described it in the following way:

It's nice to be able to do something, but it's also nice to feel that you can really do it and that it's not just skiing down the hill and then sitting down in order to stop. But it's skiing down the hill, trying something new, looking around . . . the feeling that I can easily ski and then at the same time, without being worried, keep an eye on Jeppe [another participant], that too was nice. The freedom that I can look at him and that I don't always have to focus on my ski, focus on not falling or on loose snow, or something like that.

As she describes it, her slowly acquired sense of bodily control, which is related to her (growing) ability to ski, gives Ditte a novel freedom to look at surroundings and others instead of focusing on her own body or her skis. In a similar way, many of the participants described how they gradually experienced improving their bodily control in difficult situations on the ski slope. Jimmy described how he, slowly and with assistance from a pedagogue, could make more relaxed turns on the slope, a point that highlights a different experience of control. For Jimmy and others, improved ability to maneuver on the skis was accompanied by a sense of being relaxed, calm, and able to "let go" and enjoy a freedom related to the ability to focus on various aspects of their situation other than their own body.

In the last interview, some of the participants described how they experienced being more relaxed and calm in their everyday actions after the camp, for example, when unexpected things occurred. In the last interview, Signe and Rasmus also described how they, during written exams after the camp, had a sense of being calmer and relaxed about the situation. When Signe felt stressed during the exam, she took a break to get herself together, and then she tried again—just like she did on the ski slope.

Discussion: The Value of Faith in the Body Schema. These findings can shed light on the general understanding of obstacles and challenges in APA. The two kinds of control the participants experienced on the ski slope can be analyzed as an attentive exercise of control and a bodily sense of being in control (Paherie, 2007). The participants' descriptions reveal a dialectical relation between explicit awareness and not being aware of the body, which is interesting to analyze through the distinction between body image and body schema. As Gallagher (2005, p. 34) describes:

If for some reason the body-schematic performance fails, the body takes center stage in the perceptual field. A loss of balance, disequilibrium between body and environment, may motivate a spontaneous appearance of the body in attentive consciousness.

This is what is often experienced by people with CP. It was most explicitly expressed by the participants through the rather explicit bodily awareness as they “talked to” or “yelled at” their legs on the slope. With more experience, however, the participants were able to focus on other things in their environment instead of their own body. Their bodies and the position of their skis were no longer the object of their attention all the time, and this bodily sense of ability on the ski slope can be interpreted as a matter of gaining faith in the body. Through the experience of skiing, they learned to rely on the prereflective functioning of the body schema rather than paying explicit attention to their bodies. This is in accordance with Gallagher’s (2005, p. 34) analysis as, from the quote above, he goes on to describe:

Improved performance of the body schema, however, pushes the body into the recesses of awareness. The successful maintenance of posture, an equilibrium attained between body and environment, allows us to be more attentive to the world and our surroundings than to our body.

This appears to describe very well the participants’ experiences on the ski slope. Their actions and abilities were incorporated and became part of their bodies, allowing them to pay attention to others and their surroundings in general; a phenomenon that was in particular evident in Ditte’s descriptions of her experience at the ski slope.

This interpretation mirrors phenomenological insights from other studies within APA. Jordbru, Jespersen, and Martinsen (2008) described the paradoxical case of people who from 1 day to the next lose their ability to walk (conversion gait disorder). Such persons fit into neither somatic nor psychiatric hospitals because the disorder can be located neither as an organic nor a psychic illness. Instead, the authors highlighted how behavior therapy as part of APA can provide a fruitful bodily approach, where the interventions consisted in the apparent paradox that the persons regained control of their bodies by actively becoming unaware of it. From this, the authors argued that using the body can help the persons to forget the body and, further, that forgetting the body improves their movement. A similar conclusion was reached by Duesund and Skårderud (2003), who described that horse riding interventions for people with anorexia nervosa helped them forget their bodies. More specifically, it reduced negative attention toward their own bodies. In the context of rehabilitation, Standal (2011) has described how the embodied learning of wheelchair skills can be understood as a kind of “reembodiment,” which he interprets as a gestalt switch from body image to body schema.

To further refine this, Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) phenomenological account of embodiment, and in particular his description of the embodied process of learning, can be of value:

Consciousness is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body. A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its “world,” and to move one’s body is to aim at the things through it, or to allow one’s body to respond to their solicitation, which is exerted upon the body without any representation. (pp. 159–161)

As the experiences of the participants have shown, this process of learning can involve a reflective awareness of one's body when actions do not conform with one's intentions. But their process of learning exemplified a movement toward incorporating their new abilities in order for them to grasp the motor significance of skiing on the slope. Hence, it was not a cognitive process in the sense that a refined mental representation made them capable of controlling their movements of the body. Rather, they experienced "being toward the thing," for example, toward the challenges on the ski slope, where the object of their attention was not their own bodies and where they, for the same reason, could rely on their body schema, could enjoy other aspects of their situation, and let their surroundings reveal new possibilities for action.

Merleau-Ponty argued that "objective science" cannot grasp how difficulties and ambiguity related to movement and/or perception can sometimes be resolved by having faith in the immediate and bodily relation to the world. He describes this phenomenon as a primary, originary, primordial, and perceptual faith (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp. 280, 305, 344, 375, and 475), which in relation to Gallagher's clarifications can be described as faith in the body schema. The descriptions from the participants in our study indicate that this kind of faith was part of what they learned on the camp.

Ditte's experience of "I can" due to her improved control of her body was accompanied by a sense of being able to let go, relax, and not attempt to have cognitive control over her body.⁶ This sense of being in control of course takes a level of ability, in this case skiing techniques to keep balance, but it also takes a bodily trust and faith in these abilities. It shows that control does not always mean explicitly or consciously controlling your body and the situation. In fact, sometimes the body works better when you are not reflectively aware of it. The experiences of skiing showed that the reflective experience of having or exercising control is intimately related to the prereflective experience of being in control. The phenomenological understanding of body schema can thus inform a refined understanding of bodily sense of control.

This reveals how embodied interventions such as skiing can allow participants to work with sense of control in an embodied, situated, and experience-based way. Skiing appears to have given some participants an experience of new aspects of their bodies.⁷ The study has shown that winter sports camps and in particular the ski slope can be a highly suitable venue for creating and providing meaningful challenges that are adapted to the level of functioning for each participant; a quality that can at the same time be highlighted as a special quality of APA in general.

6. This points to an understanding of bodily self-confidence that is at odds with existing cognitive theories of self-confidence (e.g., self-regulation and self-efficacy), where control and ability are related to an explicit belief in oneself. For a discussion of this, see Martiny and Aggerholm (2016).

7. The fact that some of the participants described being more relaxed when experiencing challenges, for example, exams, after the camp can tentatively be interpreted as a positive result of having learned to rely more on their prereflective being-in-the-world.

(b) Yes I Can If I Practice

Findings: Expanding the Field of Possible Actions. For many of the participants, being in control was, however, not the ultimate aim. Most of the participants actively sought new challenges once they were able to control the situations without experiencing uncertainty. They continuously tried to push their limits at their own individual level, and in several of their descriptions, the ski slope provided a very suitable venue for this kind of experience. Here, they could not simply take off their skis and walk down; or, that would at least not make the situation easier for them. Instead, they had to get up and try again when they fell. The slope thus invited experiences where they were on the limit of “I can” and “I cannot,” and where they could repeat particular ways of moving on the skis until they were able to do it.

The border between “I can” and “I cannot” was of course highly individual and each participant had his or her own aspects of skiing to practice. Ditte described how she liked to practice “my own kind of slalom,” while others worked on being calm on the slope. Some found the limit to their abilities as soon as they put the skis on and started moving, while others found it by going down steeper hills or going off-piste. Jeppe, who was more experienced, described how he had fun actively trying to transcend his comfort zone by speeding up, running over bumps on the slope, or attempting to jump in different ways.

Attempting challenging activities is of course not without danger, and Jeppe actually broke his arm as he attempted a new jump. In a less dramatic way, other participants described not only how skiing was related to toil and trouble, but also how it was related to meaning and how they, despite pains and exhaustion, engaged in more difficult challenges on the second day of the camp.

Rikke described a similar experience: “You tried something new and got more confidence. [I: How?] By saying that you did it, when you finally did it, and when you didn’t do it, you say: ‘I must try until I do.’” Rikke further described how she gained a belief in herself during the winter camp, and that in daily situations afterward when she doubts whether she can perform a certain action, she has become more inclined to continuously try until she succeeds. This kind of bodily experience at the camp also appeared to have changed some participants’ approach to challenging activities after the camp. Signe described how she experienced that “I can (do), more than I thought I could” and how she has, after the camp, decided to pursue an ordinary 3-year high school program instead of an adapted 4-year program. Ditte applied for an exchange student program and Tobias started playing football with others of his age who do not have CP instead of the special CP team he played with prior to the camp. These changes are noticeable in their descriptions, and it is interesting to see how many of them stated that they experience and approach challenging situations in their everyday life differently after the camp, that is, as something that does not necessarily stop them from doing what they want to do.

A good example of this was described by Frederik, who loved to ride his three-wheeled bike around the small city where he lives. He had never tried to ski before and was not sure if he was able to do it. In the interview after the camp, he described how he had been nervous in the beginning and did not think he would be able to ski. With help from the pedagogues,

however, he slowly managed to stay on the skis and go faster. This experience of being able to do something, which he did not think he could do, appeared to be of importance to him. Two weeks after the camp, EI received a video of Frederik from his parents with the following introduction:

If you can dream it, you can do it. Frederik's biggest dream since his first bike has always been to ride a 2-wheeled bike just once in his life. We often tried, but never succeeded. Until he tried skiing with the Elsass Center. And when he succeeded the next goal was now to ride a 2-wheeled bike. And so he did, from 3 to 2 wheels in 4 days. 14 years on 3 wheels and 5 days skiing = riding a 2-wheeled bike. Thanks to the personnel at the Elsass Institute. (anonymized and translated text from the video)

This is, however, not the end of the story. A week before the last interview, he had learned to ride a moped, and in the interview, he expressed that he now wanted to learn to drive a car. Again, we are not claiming that this is solely an effect of the camp, but in light of his descriptions and remarkable changes, it is interesting to question why he is now suddenly capable of doing these things that he could not do before. In the last interview round, we asked Frederik about riding the two-wheeled bike:

I: Why haven't you done it before? F: I didn't think about it before. I didn't believe in it.
I: Why? F: I have been able to a little the last years, I tried a little, but then I didn't feel like it anymore. I have to succeed the first time, otherwise I don't feel like doing it. I: Is that different now? F: Yes. I: You didn't succeed in riding the bike the first time. F: No I: What has changed? F: Now I gave If I don't succeed the first time, then I just have to try again. I: Did you learn that on the ski trip? F: Yes. I: What was it about the ski trip? F: If I want to do it, then I just have to get up again and go [skiing].

Frederik is a person of few words with a relatively severe speech impediment. This meant that we had to guide him and ask more specific “why” and “what” questions in addition to open “how” questions. Still, from his descriptions, it appears that the bodily experiences on the camp have played a constructive role in expanding the field of possible movements for him.

Discussion: The Value of Practicing. These findings show that an important part of the bodily experiences at the camp was related to the experience of practicing.⁸ The bodily experience of skiing at the camp was an arena where the participants, in a concrete and meaningful way, experienced practicing. Their description of practicing can shed light on a valuable aspect of APA, as it can reveal an important qualitative and processual dimension of their experience. In our discussion of this, we focus on Frederik's experiences.

Even if Frederik learned new strategies for keeping his balance, riding a two-wheeled bike was not something (i.e., a specific skill) he learned at the ski slope. This suggests that the specific nature of the learned skills might not be the most important aspects of their learning. Rather, the participants' descriptions reveal that the process of practicing and overcoming challenges had a value in itself. Also, learning new things did not mean that they stopped

8. For a more thorough analysis of this movement phenomenon, see Aggerholm (2015, 2016).

challenging themselves. They, and in particular Jeppe, went on to find new obstacles and challenges on the slope. This indicates that it was actually the journey rather than just the destination that made sense for them; they found it meaningful, not just to reach their relative goals, but to make an effort in the process toward them.

The value of practicing in an APA context also appears to transcend an outcome that can be reduced to physiological effects or expanded or improved motor functions. The fact that Frederik was able to ride a two-wheeled bike after the camp can hardly be reduced to an effect of neurological or other kind of physiological change (e.g., muscle strength or level of fitness). On the other hand, it would also be difficult to argue that Frederik's new ability was solely due to a cognitive or psychological change, because he expressed a strong will to ride the bike also before the camp; it was, as his parents described it, his biggest dream. This is not to say that the cognitive aspect played no role in his development, but we will argue that a phenomenological account of embodiment can provide a deeper and more adequate understanding of this kind of learning process.

Like the experience of control, it can be of value to regard the process of practicing in relation to Frederik's bodily experiences. Gallagher (2005) describes how an awareness of bodily movements and abilities (body image) can affect and play a constructive role in the process of practicing body-schematic performances. From this, it could be argued that Frederik's bodily experience of being able to do more than he thought he could do, by "getting up and trying again" as he put it, gave him a new awareness of his bodily capabilities and made him see his body schema as something he could revise and refine through practicing.

This can help understand how the participants took something more profound with them from the camp, namely the bodily experience of being able to modify what they can and cannot do by practicing. This is interesting in relation to CP, where the experience of intention and action can be disrupted because movements are sometimes experienced as "involuntary," which can be experienced as limiting the field of possibilities for actions. This study has shown, however, that the relation between intention and action does not have to be constant; the limits to one's actions are not determined by the degree of functional ability (or disability). By practicing on the ski slope, the participants expanded their fields of actions both in relation to the concrete activity of skiing, but apparently also in general. Some of them described a sense of being able to do more than they thought they could, which appears to have altered their attitude toward subsequent situations in their everyday life.

Another interpretation would be to consider the change as related to the body schema. This involves looking toward other aspects of consciousness than the processes that involve belief, awareness, and judgment. Gallagher (2005, p. 146) describes how the prereflective and bodily aspects of experience tacitly structure our experience and action before we know it, as they "operate as constraining and enabling factors that limit and define the possibilities of intentional consciousness." On this basis, he argues against neurophysiological and cognitive understandings of perceptual experience and action. Body schemas are not reducible to neurological functioning and the body's perceptual attunement transcends conscious control because it in fact shapes cognition and experience (Gallagher, 2005, pp. 139–146).

From this understanding, it can be argued that Frederik's bodily experiences of practicing on the ski slope revised his body schema, which, in turn, altered the intentional consciousness that constrains and enables the range of possible ways of perceiving and approaching situations (e.g., riding a two-wheeled bike). This way of interpreting his development would, in Merleau-Ponty's words, involve the embodied establishment of a novel relation of meaning to the challenging situations Frederik meets. Merleau-Ponty (1963, p. 130) describes this as a "general power of responding to situations of a certain type by means of varied reactions which have nothing in common but the meaning."

Applying these insights to the case of Frederik, it would not suffice to say that Frederik has recorded and fixated the accomplished movements on skis at a neurological or physical level or that Frederik has learned to set explicit goals and apply the means to reach these goals. Rather, it would be more in line with a phenomenological interpretation to argue that his experience of being able to do more than he thought he could if he "gets up and tries again" has built up a novel and general bodily way of relating to challenging situations.

This points to a generality of the body schema that is interesting in relation to the more general value of APA. The bodily experiences on the camp appear to have "colored" the perception and action of the participants in other areas of their everyday life, and this can inspire approaches in rehabilitation to focus on more bodily interventions where participants get to practice by meeting adapted challenges.

(c) Yes We Can

Findings: Being in the Same Boat and Learning From the Others. Another aspect that the participants focused on in the interviews was the experience of social relations on the camp. Typically, the participants experienced themselves as not being as "normal" as other peers in their daily life. They all had mild degree spastic CP and felt like they are in a "gray zone" because they do not feel as "disabled" or "abnormal" as the ones who are not able to walk and, for example, have to use wheelchairs. But on the camp, they were among other peers with similar degrees of CP, and they expressed a sense of belonging.

One participant, Joachim, runs differently to others at school, but in the first interview, he stated that it does not matter to him what they think. However, as he saw a video of himself prior to the second interview, he said, "Oy, I didn't look that stupid." This may suggest that the look from outside does matter, an indication that was sustained as he later on stressed how he enjoyed the social relations at the camp. It gave him a security, a comfort zone, where he could focus on skiing. He described how the social "gets into the body" and how it allowed him to focus on skiing and enjoy the moment, instead of "thinking thoughts." The feeling of being in the same boat as the others, being equal, was thus experienced as a relief.

Ditte described that the social aspect of the camp was like being in a bubble. She forgot about the looks from others and what people were thinking of her appearance: "You forgot what people saw when they saw us in a group here, who do not walk properly, who don't . . . But you forgot about it, because you were just in this little bubble." She described that she often feels fragile and different from the norm. At the camp, as part of the group of

peers, she was the norm. For a while, she was not different and experienced a “break” from the eyes and attention of everyone else.

Other participants also suggested that they enjoyed and learned from sharing their experiences with peers that were “in the same boat” and had similar experiences as themselves in their daily life. All the participants described how knowing that others feel the same as you and have the same struggles helped them accept many of their own daily challenges after the camp. They described how it changed their approach to problems and ultimately helped them accept their own disability in another way. As Ditte described it, after the camp, she has the courage to state her needs, for example, that she has to rest more than others at her boarding school; after the camp, she said, “I feel more like myself.”

One of the pedagogues on the camp had CP himself and became a role model for many of the participants by sharing his experiences of living a life with CP. Many of the participants also became role models for each other. Ditte described how she had often made excuses as she took part in physical education at school:

One thing is not to be able to do it, but something else is then, that you feel that the others maybe see you as disabled, because you may not be able to do what they do. That is not nice, because you want to feel that you are part of the place you are in. (. . .) If you have to make excuses all the time, so you don’t really become part of what the others do, then it is maybe just not as fun.

After the camp, her attitude to this kind of situation has changed. She described this in relation to her experience of watching the video of Frederik riding the two-wheeled bike:

It was so fun to watch and so lovely to see, because . . . I don’t know if he learned to believe in himself, but there was just something that had changed and it was so great . . . This was something that really sunk in and showed me that our disability shouldn’t stop us from pursuing the things we want . . . One can easily say “I think, I’ll just pass,” because we have, after all, this excuse, we have our disability. We can always, especially with strangers, use it as an excuse if there is something we don’t dare to do . . . and that’s probably because people don’t fully understand what it entails. Then almost always, if there’s something you really feel uncertain about, you can use it as an excuse and say “I have this disability that makes it difficult, so I probably can’t do what you are asking me to do” and I just think that it may well be, that you can’t do it quite like the others from perhaps school, but . . . it could well be that you could in fact do it. To learn how to do it is the way I think about it now.

In this way, Frederik became a role model for Ditte as he inspired her to see her disability, not as something to use as an excuse for not being able to partake in an activity, but as a legitimate part of her comportment that she accepts and that should not stop her from engaging in uncertain and challenging situations.

Jeppe, the youngest participant, was even more explicit about his experience of the others at the camp as role models. Three of the other participants attended a boarding school, which has made him aware that this could be an opportunity for him as well. Tobias, who shortly after the camp started playing football with young people without CP, gave Jeppe a sense of “if he can do it, I can do it too.” Jeppe was used to “mirroring himself” in others

without CP, for example, other skateboarders in his neighborhood, but at the camp, he felt a special relation to the group, and he described his experience of these relations in the following way:

When I look at my disability, then I don't see it as I can do that sometimes . . . but not like toil and trouble . . . then I think more about it as a gift, kind of. You get a certain unity with one another. I don't know about the others, if they, like me, have this fighter-will, but I don't think I would have this without them. It's about mirroring oneself in others. (. . .) I think that It might be that it gives me a lot of disadvantages, but it also gives me a lot of advantages, about understanding life, kind of. Yes, in that way You shouldn't see it as a disadvantage, you should see it as a gift, otherwise you don't get anything out of it.

In this way, the special experience he had on the camp has contributed to seeing his own disability as a kind of advantage, and even a gift, rather than a disadvantage.

Discussion: The Value of Social Relations. These findings indicate that the social aspect played a central role in the embodied experiences of the participants both during and after the camp. In general, people with CP often experience a reflective awareness of their own body and their appearance, as they sense the gaze of others (Hammar et al., 2009). This kind of experience was, in the descriptions of the participants, related to a sense of being different than others, for example, the others at their school. In Joachim's descriptions, it became apparent that reflection is not just an individual matter. It is also about the social relations, that is, how they are reflected in the social surroundings.

Researchers have argued for the special relevance of sports camps as a “therapeutic landscape” for experiencing a sense of community that can help young people connect and thereby move beyond their previously understood limits (Goodwin et al., 2011; Goodwin & Staples, 2005). This was also the case in our study. In phenomenological terms, the experience of being among others with the same degree of CP contributed to an experience of bodily coexistence. At the winter camp, the participants were not the ones that do not fit in, not “the others,” anymore. They appeared to be less reflective about their relations with others, which can be interpreted as a relation of intercorporeality where there is a direct, affective, and bodily resonance between persons (Gallagher, 2008). Being in a bubble, or being in the same boat, allowed them to pay less attention to their own body and more to their surroundings. It “goes into the body,” as Joachim put it, and allows them to be more relaxed and calm, and forget how they appear in the eyes of others. Thus, it allowed the participants to be less self-conscious.

The participants also expressed the importance of sharing experiences with each other, looking toward the others, and learning from each other. Standal and Jespersen (2008) have argued for the crucial role of social relations and situations as part of learning in and through APA. A social and situated view on learning transcends a focus on acquiring techniques and skills, and allows individuals to pay attention to other dimensions regarding identity and negotiation of meaning in communities of practice. Peers can function as role models and exemplars in APA interventions, as they embody the goals of learning and present

participants with standards of excellence to which they can compare themselves in order for them to guide their development. This was central to many participants in our study, most explicitly in Ditte's experience of seeing the development of Frederik. In general, our study shows that the social relations on the camp played a constructive role in shaping the participants' understanding of themselves. This can be interpreted with help from the phenomenological account of a socially embedded narrative self (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008, pp. 194–195). This describes how we develop in social contexts and how we come to understand both ourselves and others through sharing narratives. The relation to others thus plays a crucial role in the development of a self-narrative, which in our study was illustrated by the way that the sense of being accepted by others appeared to play a valuable role in the participants' self-understanding and self-acceptance.

In this way, the relations to others at the camp played a crucial role for the participants, and in relation to this, it is interesting that many of them stated that their parents were very surprised about their expanded abilities during and after the camp. This social element of embodiment points to how the camp appears to have been a valuable “free space,” where the participants have been able to bracket expectations regarding their abilities that they meet in their ordinary everyday life and take up new challenges in a new social setting. This points to how bodily experiences can contribute to challenging existing discourses and norms. Many of the parents indicated that the events during and after the camp had opened their eyes to how the functional limitations of their children are changeable rather than fixed. This can help refine their own, as well as others', understanding of what the young people are able to do.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented a study of a winter sports camp for young people with CP. Through a phenomenological analysis of the findings of this study, we have paid special attention to the embodied experience of the participants in this intervention. This focus on experience was presented as an alternative to medical and sociocultural approaches in APA, and through our focus on embodiment, it also presents a contrast to more cognitive interventions. By focusing on the phenomenological notion of “I can” and by using the conceptual tools of body image and body schema to analyze the bodily experiences of the participants, our analysis highlighted three central ways in which the camp contributed to their development: first, by giving them an experience of higher degree of being in control as they learned to have more faith in their body schema; second, by providing bodily experiences of how both their body schema and body image can be altered through practicing; and third, through social relations that allowed them to be less self-conscious and understand themselves in new ways.

Because this was a small-scale qualitative study that did not operate with a control group, the generalizability of the findings and long-term effects are not evident. Also, the findings cannot be used to directly prescribe how future camps should be organized. But our findings can contribute to underpinning the value and importance of bodily experiences with challenges in APA for young people with CP. These young people took home something from the camp that is much more profound than motor function or cognitive skills, as it involved their bodily being-in-the-world. By highlighting the experiential and bodily dimensions, the

study can thus inspire and inform more qualitative- and experience-based approaches in APA, which can provide the basis for future pedagogical work in this field.

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